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Contact: Aja Sae-Kung, NOAA
(202) 482-6090
Dr. Quenton Dokken, GoMF
(361) 882-3939

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NOAA AWARDS \$386,000 To Gulf of Mexico Foundation

The U.S. Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced a \$386,000 grant to the Gulf of Mexico Foundation as part of a multi-project cooperative partnership to restore habitat vital to the Gulf of Mexico's coastal fisheries. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The grant award kicks off a second three-year restoration effort between NOAA, GoMF and the EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program that was first established in 2001. The funding will continue restoration efforts between GoMF and the NOAA Restoration Center for projects that benefit the coastal habitats of the five Gulf States. These projects improve fisheries by providing nursery areas and food sources for commercially and recreationally fished species. The objective is to restore marine, estuarine and riparian habitats. These include salt marshes, seagrass beds, oyster reefs, coral reefs, mangrove forests, shellfish beds and freshwater spawning and rearing habitats in streams and rivers.

"This partnership between NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation is an example of a strong alliance that results in valuable projects and initiatives," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA's goal of healthy coastal habitats and vibrant coastal communities can only be accomplished when there is strong local stewardship of the habitats that support our fisheries resources."

"The partnership between NOAA, the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation has been very productive in habitat restoration in the gulf states," said Dr. Quenton Dokken, executive director of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. "We expect the next three years to be even more productive."

The goal of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation is to promote ecological preservation and conservation through community stewardship and collaborative partnerships. GoMF will continue to work with the state Gulf Ecological Management Site managers, the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program and NOAA Fisheries to identify and implement habitat restoration projects. Past projects funded through the NOAA Restoration Center partnership with GoMF include opening sturgeon passages and building a mangrove nursery at Bahia Grande, one of the largest estuarine restoration projects in the country.

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NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) works with community organizations and local governments to support locally-driven habitat restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas. NOAA CRP funds on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that provide long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. To date, nearly 800 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners since 1996.

Each year, NOAA awards approximately \$900 million in grants to members of the academic, scientific and business communities to assist the agency in fulfilling its mission to study the Earth's natural systems to predict environmental change, manage ocean resources, protect life and property and provide decision makers with reliable scientific information. NOAA goals and programs reflect a commitment to these basic responsibilities of science and service to the nation for the past 33 years.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

<http://www.noaa.gov>

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>

<https://www.gulfmex.org>